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"The Powers Within"

A Drama in Four Acts

Embodying a Study of the Passions, Eccen-
tricities, and Impulses of Men
and Women

BY

Arthur J. Ebert

Author of

"In Love's Captivity"
"The Young Philanthropist"
"A Battle of Hearts"

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By ARTHUR J. EBERT
Milwaukee, Wis.

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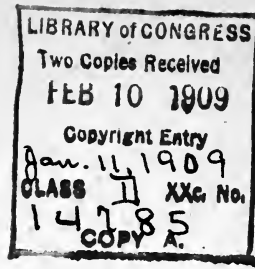
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CHARACTERS.

THOMAS ERFORD,	Assistant Cashier of the Gotham National Bank, who finds much recreation in literary work.
THEODORE WILBUR,	Paying Teller at the Gotham National Bank.
WILLIAM LAWSON,	A friend to both.
LEOLA STANLEY,	A Student in the New York School of Art.
LUCILLE VILAS,	Also a Student in the New York School of Art.
MRS. ERFORD,	Tom's mother.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES.

- ACT I. Stanley's Summer Home in the Catskill Mountains on the Hudson.
- ACT II. Lucille's Apartments, New York.
- ACT III. Mr. Erford's Study, New York.
- ACT VI. Same as Act. III.

The Powers Within

THE FIRST ACT.

Stanley's summer home in the Catskill Mountains on the Hudson. The scene represents the grounds immediately in front of a small summer cottage on the Hudson River. The porch and front of the cottage occupy the right of the stage. Large trees surround the immediate vicinity, behind which the river is plainly visible. A sixteen-foot canoe of blue tint bearing the name of "Duckie" occupies the left of the stage. An old hammock is hung between the cottage and a tree to the left of it. An artist's easel and an unfinished water-color painting occupies the right of the stage. At the rise of the curtain Leola is busily engaged in painting.

TED. *enters from left of stage. He runs on tip toes to LEOLA and kisses her.*

LEOLA. (*Turning. Angered.*) Ted, you spoiled the picture.

TED. What picture?

LEOLA. Why, the picture I'm painting, of course.

TED. I'm sorry. Where?

LEOLA. Here. (*Pointing with brush.*) This green line don't belong there.

TED. I'm awfully sorry, Lee. Can't you make a fish out of it?

LEOLA. Who ever heard of a fish swimming in the air.

TED. Attach a little line to it. Paint a pole here (*pointing*) a picture of me there, and it will look as though I was pulling

a big bass out of the water.

LEOLA. That wouldn't look natural.

TED. (*Laughs.*) No—I never had the patience. Can't you make a sail boat out of it?

LEOLA. Not unless I enlarge the river, and that wouldn't look artistic on so small a picture. Besides who ever heard of a green sail boat?

TED. That's true, too. Suppose you paint another tree there.

LEOLA. I suppose I'll have to now.

TED. You're not angry are you? (*Takes her hand affectionately.*)

LEOLA. I never get angry.

TED. You were just a little, weren't you?

LEOLA. Let's not talk about it.

TED. All right. How did you enjoy the dance last night. (*Lights a cigarette.*)

LEOLA. We had a dandy time. Tom is a fine dancer. He can dance the barn dance twelve different ways.

TED. My! That's going some. I'm sorry I wasn't out here last night.

LEOLA. Yes, I missed you.

TED. I'm sorry—and yet I'm glad to hear it.

LEOLA. Hear what?

TED. That you missed me.

LEOLA. Oh well, you wrote that you would be here for the dance and I expected you.

TED. I know, but the auto was to blame. We had quite a lot of tire trouble on the way. We didn't get out here until after mid-night. (*He sits on the grass next to her.*) Did Tom take you across in "Duckie"?

LEOLA. No, we took the launch.

TED. Did his Newport girl go back to the city?

LEOLA. Tom's?

TED. Yes.

LEOLA. I don't know, I never met her.

TED. She was here last week. He was quite spoony with her on the launch last Wednesday night.

LEOLA. Who told you that.

TED. I was on the launch myself. I heard he was engaged to her.

LEOLA. What's her name.

TED. Frances Hatton.

LEOLA. Oh, Frances Hatton. I met her about a week ago. She's a very pretty girl.

TED. I understand she left because he became rather familiar with other pretty girls around here.

LEOLA. Why are you telling me all this?

TED. Because I don't think he's the best kind of company for you.

LEOLA. A person oughtn't believe everything one hears.

TED. I've seen him myself. He's rather free in distributing his kisses and affection.

LEOLA. I doubt that, Ted. He's well liked by all the people stopping here, and he's always been a gentleman while in my presence.

TED. I won't contradict that—but you just ask the bachelor boys about him. They'll tell you the same thing.

LEOLA. They needn't talk about other men. There ain't any of them angels either. I've heard a few very unpleasant reports about some of them and you'll not find me looking for information around their cottage.

TED. (*He lights cigarette.*) I don't like to talk about people as a rule, unless I can say good things about them. But under the circumstances I think it's best that you should know.

LEOLA. I'm glad you told me. (*She rises and crosses to hammock, takes her bracelet off and places it on the other arm.*)

TED. (*Notices this. He throws his cigarette away and crosses to hammock.*) Why did you place your bracelet on the other arm.

LEOLA. (*Laughing.*) I did that unconsciously.

TED. Oh! Have you spoken to your dad about our proposed engagement?

LEOLA. No, not yet.

TED. You're going to, ain't you Lee? (*Sits in hammock.*)

LEOLA. (*Sighs.*) I suppose so.

TED. When?

LEOLA. As soon as he gets back from his trip West.

TED. When will he return.

LEOLA. In about two months.

TED. That's a mighty long time to wait. (*He takes her hand affectionately.*) Leola, do you remember when we were kids at school. We were lovers then. I remember well when I left school and got my first job. Gee! I was happy at seven dollars per. I figured out how two could live on that amount plus an allowance from dad. You remember we wanted to elope and we nearly succeeded.

LEOLA. Yes, I remember.

TED. There's no need of that now. We're both of age. And so far as the financial end is concerned, we needn't worry. Leola, I want you now!

LEOLA. Let's wait until dad gets home.

TED. In two months—then we'll make it sure?

LEOLA. Yes.

TED. Leola, I love you! (*He kisses and caresses her.*)

Enters WILL from right.

WILL. I think I got in wrong here. (*Turns to go. He meditates. Coughs artificially.*) (*They release their hold.*) That's all right, just finish up, I've got lots of time.

TED. Well Bill, what do you want?

WILL. I don't want anything. Just figured on trespassing on this property. It cuts off quite a bit to come around this way to go to the bachelor's camp.

TED. Yes, it does save some.

WILL. Now, if you don't mind, I'll just tip-toe across this stretch without causing the slightest vibration. (*Tip-toes to left*)

of stage.)

LEOLA. You didn't even move the swing.

WILL. Yet I fear I am causing some little delay in the movements of the occupants. By the way, Ted, did you see Tom?

TED. No, I suppose he's at the camp.

WILL. I presume he is. Big John is celebrating his birthday and he's setting 'em up at the camp. I suppose you'll be there.

TED. Yes, I promised the boys I would.

LEOLA. Go with him, Ted. I'm going to take a dip. My usual hour, you know.

TED. (*Rising.*) All right. I'll see you later then?

LEOLA. Yes, I'll be through in half an hour.

TED. (*At left of stage.*) I'll fan your hair for you.

WILL. And I'll promise not to disturb you.

(*They exit. LEOLA crosses toward door in cabin.*)

Enters LUCILLE from right. She is carrying a book in one hand and a suit case in the other hand. She is attired in a walking dress.)

LUCILLE. (*Upon entering.*) Hello, Leola!

LEOLA. (*Turning.*) Hello, Lucille! (*Rushes toward her.*) You really came after all. (*Kisses her.*)

LUCILLE. Yes, if only to evade several persistent suitors.

LEOLA. I'm glad you came. (*Takes her suit case.*) Tell me all the news. I'm just dying to hear something real exciting. (*She places the suit case on the porch.*)

LUCILLE. I've been too busy refusing proposals to interest myself in anything else. Me for the quiet life for a while.

LEOLA. You can't blame the men altogether, your popularity amongst them creates this aggressive rivalry. It sort of hurries them to pop the question for fear another's proposal might meet serious consideration on your part.

LUCILLE. Nothing like that yet. I'm too happy as I am to seriously consider any of them.

LEOLA. What's that you're reading?

LEOLA. "A month minus one week," (*Laughs.*) It isn't so

bad. (*A letter drops from book.*)

LEOLA. (*Picks up the letter.*) You dropped something.

LUCILLE. (*Turning.*) Oh, did I.

LEOLA. (*Looks at envelope.*) I've seen that handwriting before.

LUCILLE. Possibly. It's from an old flame of mine.

LEOLA. Oh! It looks like Mr. Erford's handwriting.

LUCILLE. Do you know him?

LEOLA. Yes.

LUCILLE. He's a great flirt.

LEOLA. I heard so. Tell me, do you know anything about him.

LUCILLE. Do I? Well, I should say. He proposed to me.

LEOLA. He proposed to you?

LUCILLE. Yes, twice. Once by mail. I think this is the letter. (*Opens it.*) Yes, this is the one. Read it—it's interesting. (*She reads it.*) He certainly knows how to use flowery language don't you think so?

LEOLA. He writes a very fine love letter.

LUCILLE. Yes, he's quite a dreamer.

LEOLA. I love dreamers.

LUCILLE. How long do you know him?

LEOLA. I only met him about a month ago, out here.

LUCILLE. Oh, is he out here now?

LEOLA. Yes.

LUCILLE. Has he been seeing you often?

LEOLA. Almost every day.

LUCILLE. You don't say. What does Ted say about it?

LEOLA. He don't know. (*She returns the letter.*)

LUCILLE. I'd cut him out if I were you. He's fickle.

Enters TOM ERFORD from left.

TOM. Good morning! (*Tips hat. They bow. LEOLA smiles.*) I'm surprised to see you out here, Lucille.

LUCILLE. So am I to see you. (*She rises and crosses to cottage.*)

TOM. Don't let me disturb you. I'll return later.

LUCILLE. I've got to go in and unpack my suit case anyway.

TOM. Do you need any assistance?

LUCILLE. No, thanks. (*She exits.*)

TOM. (*To Leola.*) Were you talking about me when I entered.

LEOLA. No. (*Sits in swing.*)

TOM. I'm glad to hear you weren't. I wouldn't want you to take everything she says seriously. She likes to talk a whole lot.

LEOLA. Why aren't you at the camp?

TOM. I just come from there. You don't object to my calling, do you?

LEOLA. No, certainly not.

TOM. May I sit down here.

LEOLA. Yes. (*She takes her bracelet from arm.*)

TOM. (*Notices her.*) Leola, why did you take your bracelet off. (*Takes hold of it.*) You know I wished it on and you were supposed to keep it there until tonight. (*He takes the bracelet off.*)

LEOLA. (*Indifferently.*) I never thought about that.

TOM. Let me wish it on again.

LEOLA. I will, under one condition.

TOM. And that is?

LEOLA. You must tell me what you wished.

TOM. Is that fair?

LEOLA. Why not?

TOM. Under those circumstances I may not wish just what I would like to.

LEOLA. Well then, I suppose it'll have to remain as it is. (*She pulls her hand over on to her lap.*)

TOM. (*Places the bracelet on her arm.*) It's rather childish anyway to do these things—and yet, it helps to pass the time away when there's nothing else of interest to talk about.

LEOLA. Did you make a wish?

TOM. Yes. My first wish holds good.

LEOLA. The one you made yesterday?

TOM. Yes.

LEOLA. Is it something that you expect very far in the future?

TOM. No, I'd just as soon it would happen now.

LEOLA. Then it hasn't come true yet?

TOM. I don't know.

LEOLA. Can't you find out?

TOM. (*Slight pause.*) Leola, I wished that you would learn to like me better each time I called.

LEOLA. Why, I can't like you better than I do.

TOM. I mean it in a broader sense. Leola, I love you! (*Makes a movement toward her.*)

LEOLA. (*Turns away.*) Now you spoiled it all.

TOM. What, Leola?

LEOLA. I—I thought we would be such good friends.

TOM. (*In a tremor.*) I love you, Leola—I love you. (*He kisses her hand.*)

LEOLA. I'm sorry, Tom.

TOM. I don't want you to be sorry. I want you to be happy! (*With another movement toward her.*) Leola!

LEOLA. Don't! Don't! (*She rises.*)

TOM. (*Rising.*) Can I hope, Leola?

LEOLA. I'm afraid not.

TOM. Why?

LEOLA. I don't care for you in just that way.

TOM. We haven't known each other very long. I loved you the very first moment I saw you. Possibly you haven't had time to know me well enough.

LEOLA. It isn't that. I like you Tom. In fact, I like you too well to pull you on with something that can never be.

TOM. Don't say that. Where there's life there is hope.

LEOLA. I don't see what there's to love about me! There are lots of prettier girls than I am—Lucille, for instance, and

scores of others.

TOM. Are you trying to discourage me, or have you been hearing things?

LEOLA. Neither, exactly.

TOM. Did Lucille speak about me to you?

LEOLA. Yes.

TOM. I suppose she told you that we were very good friends some time ago.

LEOLA. Yes.

TOM. Is that all she told you?

LUCILLE *enters from cottage.*

LUCILLE. Are you going in for a dip today, Leola?

LEOLA. Yes, I ought to be going now. Are you going?

LUCILLE. Not until tomorrow. I don't feel very well today.

LEOLA. You entertain Tom while I get ready. Excuse me.

(*To Tom.*)

TOM. Certainly. (*Leola exits.*) How long do you know, Leola?

LUCILLE. Oh, possibly half a year.

TOM. You met her after our little misunderstanding then.

LUCILLE. Yes, if that's what you call it. I met her at the art school. We are both studying there you know.

TOM. I didn't know you were.

LUCILLE. I've always been interested in the work. We are going to have an art exhibit at my home some time in November. You don't want to mind that.

TOM. I won't if I get an invitation.

LUCILLE. Leola will do the inviting. (*She sits in swing.*)

TOM. Do you devote very much time to the work?

LUCILLE. I do a little every day.

TOM. I'm glad to hear that. Then you've cut out some of your frequent visitors.

LUCILLE. Just a few undesirable ones.

TOM. Do you class me amongst the undesirable?

LUCILLE. No—what makes you think so?

TOM. I didn't think so. I just wanted to make sure. You've been speaking about me to Leola, I suppose?

LUCILLE. Yes, today for the first time.

TOM. What did you tell her?

LUCILLE. We haven't had time to say more than that I knew you, and that she knew you—and—well, that's about all.

TOM. Your quite sure?

LUCILLE. Of course I'm sure. What makes you doubt me?

TOM. I've always had that habit of doubting you lately, haven't I?

LUCILLE. Yes, and it's very annoying. If you'll excuse me I'll get something to read. (*Exits.*)

Enters TED from right.

TED. Rather cold reception, eh?

TOM. Rather. Have you been listening?

TED. (*Sternly.*) For some time.

TOM. What's bothering you Ted?

TED. A whole lot—you in particular!

TOM. I?

TED. Yes, you! (*Speaks close to his face.*)

TOM. You've been drinking, Ted. You better chew some cloves.

TED. Cloves, be damned!

TOM. Well, I really do believe you're serious.

TED. Yes, and you'd better be careful too when I am serious! You've been trying to make love to Leola!

TOM. In what way does that concern you?

TED. In every way! Leola and I have been lovers for years. I'm all but engaged to her. We are only waiting for her father to sanction such a move by her.

TOM. I didn't know that.

TED. Well, I'm telling you.

TOM. I'm glad you did.

TED. You'll have to cut out trying to make love to her. She's not that kind.

TOM. What do you mean by "Not that kind"?

TED. You know.

TOM. I don't understand what you mean by connecting my position with your contemptuous remark.

TED. Well, to be more explicit, she's not the spoony kind you're generally looking for.

TOM. That's an insult, Ted, and you're the last one I'd credit with such a remark. I love her—do you hear—I love her! It is unfortunate, indeed, that we both love the same girl.

TED. After what she told you I should think you'd understand that she cares more for someone else.

TOM. I didn't exactly construe it that way.

TED. You're mighty dence then.

TOM. Ted, I'm not accustomed to allowing people to speak to me in such an uncivil manner, without retorting with a severe tongue thrashing. I advise you to take a good long sleep to shake off the effects of the liquor you've been drinking.

TED. I know what I'm talking about, even though I did have a high-ball or two.

TOM. It isn't so much what you had today, but the grouch you've "got on" after awakening the old one of last night.

TED. What old one of last night?

TOM. The one you got at the dance on the country road—that tire trouble of yours.

TED. Who told you?

TOM. The boys.

TED. That hasn't anything to do with our affair now.

TOM. Not directly; I just wanted to remind you that you're not an angel by any means.

TED. Well, who said I was an angel?

TOM. Nobody. (*Slight pause.*) I'd like to have a sensible talk with you if I knew that you would appreciate it.

TED. Appreciate what?

TOM. I believe I said a sensible talk.

TED. Well?

TOM. Will you sit down for a few minutes?

TED. I'm just as comfortable standing.

TOM. That's a very insensible beginning. (*Crosses to him.*)
You say that you love Leola?

TED. I do, and have for years.

TOM. What objection is there to my feeling the same as you for Leola? I'm sincere in my love, and I have no doubt that you are too. Now then, let us be fair and square in this affair. Let her choose between us. If I loose I'll acknowledge my defeat by withdrawing. If I am successful I'll expect you to do the same. Isn't that fair?

TED. Well, why don't you withdraw then?

TOM. Why?

TED. She told you that she doesn't care for you in that way.

TOM. Women are hard to understand. They say one thing and mean the other. I've only approached her once on this subject. Until I am convinced that there is no hope for me I don't see what should prevent me from trying.

TED. I'd advise you to stay away.

TOM. I can't see any logical reason why I should.

TED. Leola isn't the first girl you've tried to make love to out here.

TOM. You are adding injury to insult now. To say you are lying is placing it mildly. Who told you?

TED. No one in particular. They all seem to know it.

TOM. Who, for instance?

TED. I don't care to mention any names.

TOM. Who is the girl they connect in the affair

TED. Miss Hatton is one.

TOM. Mrs. Hatton, if you please.

TED. Oh, is she married?

TOM. She was.

TED. Oh, a widow—still worse.

TOM. Yes, she's my sister. Any objection to her brother kissing her?

TED. I didn't know you had a sister.

TOM. You see, Ted, how very easily people can be mistaken. They are even ready to jump at conclusions.

Enters LUCILLE and LEOLA from cottage. LEOLA wears a long bath robe. LUCILLE carries a book.

LUCILLE. Who will direct me to a nice nook near by?

LEOLA. Ted knows several pretty places.

TED. I'll take you to one.

LUCILLE. Thank you.

TED. *(To Leola.)* Will you be in the water very long?

LEOLA. No, about five minutes. I'm just gonig to take a dip.

TED. I'll be back in time to keep my promise.

LEOLA. All right. *(Runs off right.)*

LUCILLE. *(To Tom.)* Kindly excuse us. *(Tom bows slightly.) (Tom crosses to easel, takes the picture in he hands and admires it.)*

Enters BILL from left.

BILL. Hello, Tom. Where's Leola?

TOM. She's taking a dip.

BILL. You waiting for her to return?

TOM. Yes.

BILL. You've been visiting her quite often lately. Anything serious?

TOM. Perhaps.

BILL. I'm afraid its more serious than you imagine. I met Ted at the bachelor's. He's very jealous.

TOM. Yes, I know.

BILL. I want to give you a tip. Be careful of Ted—especially today.

TOM. Why?

BILL. He said several things that cause me to believe that he's a dangerous chap to deal with.

TOM. Dangerous? In what way?

BILL. He told me very emphatically that if he caught you

making love to Leola, he'd kill you.

TOM. (*Laughs.*) The little fool.

BILL. His remark carried with it an air of determination, I, for one, didn't like. I'd advise you to stay away from here today.

TOM. Do you think that he'd be fool enough to do it.

BILL. I'd dislike to see you take the chances. Come, Tom, let's go over to the hotel.

TOM. I really believe you are afraid.

BILL. I am; such things have happened before, you know. Come on, Tom, (*Takes him around waiste.*) let's play tennis.

TOM. I will in just a few minutes. I want a word with her.

BILL. Won't tomorrow do as well?

Re-enters LUCILLE and TED.

LUCILLE. (*Looking searchingly on the ground.*) Did you see a silk handkerchief lying about here?

BILL. Hello, Lucille!

LUCILLE. (*Looking up.*) Hello, Will! How are you? I haven't seen you for several weeks. Why don't you call?

BILL. There's a stringency in the money market just now.

(*TOM crosses toward easel and looks at picture.*)

LUCILLE. What's that got to do with it.

BILL. It sort a put me out of the running. I sold my automobile so that I could afford to keep up with the common people.

LUCILLE. I'm sorry it struck you so hard.

TED. (*Finds handkerchief on hammock.*) Is this the one?

LUCILLE. (*Taking it.*) Yes, thanks. (*To Bill.*) I've moved, you know.

BILL. Oh, is that so? Who moved you?

LUCILLE. Who moved me?

BILL. Pardon me—I—I ment where?

LUCILLE. Apartment Five, in the New Brevoort.

BILL. Oh, the New Brevoort—quite a fashionable apartment house.

LUCILLE. Yes, it's quite exclusive, too. You must call sometime when I get back to the city. I'll show you the apartment.

BILL. I shan't fail to do so.

LUCILLE. I'll see you later. I've come to an interesting place in this book and I'm just dying to continue.

BILL. I can imagine at what stage of the story you are.

LUCILLE. (*Slightly embarrassed.*) You're too observing.
(*Covers up the title. She exits with TED.*)

BILL. (*To TOM.*) When did she come out?

TOM. This afternoon.

BILL. Stopping here?

TOM. Yes, with Lee.

BILL. That makes it rather bad for you.

TOM. You seem to know her quite well.

BILL. I do, and I'd give up anything I possess if I could tame her. Strange you never mentioned her faults to me.

TOM. Nothing strange about that. Opinions differ. You may like what I dislike, or see and judge things with quite a different mind.

BILL. Hardly possible in her case.

TOM. Too bad so pretty a face bears so evil a tongue and so weak a mind.

BILL. I think both of us had the same sort of spell. Head and heels in love with her, eh? (*Laughs.*)

TOM. A mere infatuation on my part. A pretty face, a perfect figure, a winning smile, are her only assets. She's heartless and devoid of the noblest of virtues—honesty and sincerity.

BILL. To a great degree.

TOM. It's pitiable, Bill. New York is full of pretty girls who have gone to the dogs with just such a beginning. If I weren't so devilish poor and were free from the bondage of love elsewhere, I'd sacrifice every drop of my blood to save her from herself.

BILL. How would I do?

TOM. First rate. You've got money, and I think she likes you too. She's on the verge now, and if you can win her over, heart and soul, she'll make a dear, sweet wife.

BILL. I don't doubt the dear part of it. I've spent half a fortune on her already.

TOM. Do you care enough for her to spend the other half?

BILL. I've tried hard to hold myself in check against it.

TOM. Then you still love her?

BILL. I'm afraid I do. I want your advise and assistance.

TOM. Assistance I cannot offer. Advice there is but little for me to give you. Play hearts always, save your diamonds until after you've won out.

BILL. Suppose she strikes back with her clubs and with the assistance of her spades, digs deeper and deeper into my diamond suit. (*Digs both hands deeply into his trouser pockets.*)

TOM. I wouldn't renege. I'd play the hand I hold—declare hearts trump—play them repeatedly and save your diamonds to complete your count. Her hand of clubs and spades will fade with every play you make, and at the end of the hand you'll have won every black card in the deck, and when you play the second hand, deal her only hearts and force her to lead the play to you.

BILL. That's somewhat deep, but I think I catch the point all right.

TOM. In other words, make sure she loves you before you show her your bank account.

BILL. Let's go over to the hotel and talk this over.

TOM. I will in just a few minutes. I want a word with Leola.

BILL. Won't tomorrow do as well?

TOM. (*Looking off right.*) She's coming out of the water now. I'll follow you in less than ten minutes.

BILL. All right, have it your way. (*Starts left.*) There's Ted now. Do you see him?

TOM. Yes, he's going toward the camp.

BILL. Apparently. Bear in mind what I told you. (*Exits.*) (*Tom crosses toward easel and scrutinizes the picture. Leola enters from right.*)

LEOLA. (*Crossing up.*) How do you like the picture now?

TOM. I think it's great! You've developed it wonderfully since yesterday. (*Points at picture.*) What does this represent?

LEOLA. (*Smiling.*) An interruption.

TOM. (*Doubtfully.*) A what?

LEOLA. In other words, an abrupt disturbance. I was frightened—that's the result. It's easily remedied though. (*Crosses to cabin.*)

TOM. Can I see you a few minutes after your dressed?

LEOLA. I don't mind.

TED enters unperceived from right; he crosses behind a tree in right center.

TOM. I don't like the way you say it, Leola,

LEOLA. How would you have me say it?

TOM. It's hardly fair for me to tell you.

LEOLA. I'm willing to learn.

TOM. I don't know just how to take you,

LEOLA. I've been told that frequently. Even my dearest friends find it difficult.

(BILL enters softly from left and crosses directly behind TED.)

TOM. Leola, I want to be one of your dear friends. (*Takes hold of her hand.*) And I want to understand you.

(TED makes a move with hand toward his hip pocket.)

LEOLA. I'm afraid you never will.

(BILL succeeds in taking the revolver from TED'S pocket and places it in his own.)

TOM. (*Makes a movement toward her.*) Leola! (*She turns aside He lowers his head and kisses her hand. TED meanwhile makes a quick move for his pocket. Upon finding it empty he turns abruptly and stands face to face with BILL, while the curtain drops upon the picture.*)

THE SECOND ACT.

Lucille's Apartment, New York. - The scene represents a handsome apartment in the home of Lucille, elegantly furnished with a modern parlor suit. The walls are almost entirely covered with oil and water-color paintings, the majority being unframed. There is a large window in the back wall, a door in the right wall and another in the wall left. At rise of curtain TED is discovered on a small ladder, hanging a picture on the back wall, while LUCILLE is standing in the center of the room. LEOLA is busily engaged arranging a large bouquet of American beauties in a vase on the mantle-piece left.

TED. (*Hanging picture.*) How's that?

LUCILLE. A little higher.

TED. That better?

LUCILLE. Just a trifle to the left. (*Moves it.*) There, that's about right. Don't you think so Leola?

LEOLA. (*Turning.*) Yes. (*Slight pause.*) I can't get all these flowers in this vase.

LUCILLE. Use the other one on the table. Have you discovered a card yet?

LEOLA. (*Taking other vase.*) No, there's no card here.

LUCILLE. That's strange.

LEOLA. Somebody must have sent them.

LUCILLE. I didn't order any flowers. Only the ferns, and they haven't arrived yet. (*Door bell rings.*)

LEOLA. I suppose that's the florist now. (*LUCILLE exits right.*)

TED. (*Coming down from ladder.*) Anything else I can do?

LEOLA. You may pick up these leaves.

TED. (*Picks up the leaves.*) I've been wanting to see you alone since I came here. Your father—did he come home?

LEOLA. Yes, this morning.

TED. Did you ask him.

LEOLA. Yes.

TED. What did he say? (*Anxiously.*)

LEOLA. He'd think it over.

TED. (*Disheartened.*) Another delay?

LEOLA. Perhaps. He wants a talk with you, I think.

TED. I'll go over and see him now.

LEOLA. He's not in the best of humor today.

TED. Hang it all, Leola. I'm not going to marry your father anyway. Let's decide now. (*Takes hold of her hand.*)

LEOLA. You're not afraid of him?

TED. It isn't that, Leola. I want your answer first.

LEOLA. There was a time not so very long ago when you knew how to propose.

TED. (*Brightening.*) I'm not entirely devoid of the art of making brilliant speeches, but I've entirely exhausted my power of originality. I can only repeat again and again, I love you—I love you—I love you! (*She sinks into his ready embrace.*) Are we engaged?

LEOLA. I don't know.

TED. I've got the missing link. (*Takes a ring from his pocket and places it on her finger.*) There, now we are engaged.

LEOLA. (*Sighs.*) I suppose so.

TED. Leola, do you love me?

LEOLA. Of course I love you, Ted. I wouldn't permit you to kiss me if I didn't.

TED. I'm trying hard to understand you. I feel so restrained.

LEOLA. I wouldn't if I were you. I'd just do things.

TED. Leola! (*He kisses her.*)

LUCILLE *re-enters with two boxes of flowers.*

LUCILLE. If I catch you doing that again I'll announce your engagement.

TED. You might as well do it now; it's all settled.

LUCILLE. (*Surprised.*) What? Is that on the level?

LEOLA. (*Showing ring.*) Isn't it a beauty?

LUCILLE. (*Looking at it.*) My, I should say so; the size of it too. I'll bet it cost Ted a few hundred anyway.

LEOLA. I hope not. I never cared very much for expensive jewelry.

LUCILLE. It's made you very happy anyway, and that's worth a whole lot. I congratulate you, Ted. (*Extending hand.*)

TED. Thank you, Lucille. (*Takes her hand.*)

LUCILLE. You have chosen an appropriate moment. The very atmosphere seems to suggest, as well as appreciate your action. (*Gives her a box of flowers.*)

LEOLA. For me.

LUCILLE. Yes.

LEOLA. From whom?

LUCILLE. I don't know.

LEOLA. (*Smiling.*) My, bless their hearts. (*Takes box and opens it.*)

LUCILLE. (*Opens the other box.*) I know from whom these are without opening the box.

LEOLA. From Will?

LUCILLE. No. I'll bet there from my new acquaintance—the theatrical manager.

LEOLA. (*Noticing card.*) Oh, Ted—thank you.

TED. Shall I get a vase.

LUCILLE. Yes, you'll find some in the library. Bring two.

TED. All right. (*Exits.*)

LUCILLE. (*Noticing card.*) You were right—they're from Will.

LEOLA. I'm anxious to know who sent those American beauties.

LUCILLE. Possibly Tom.

LEOLA. That may be.

LUCILLE. Did you send him an invitation?

LEOLA. Yes.

LUCILLE. Do you think he'll come?

LEOLA. He said he would.

LUCILLE. I thought perhaps he wouldn't.

LEOLA. Why?

LUCILLE. The exhibit is at my house, you know. Well, we won't miss much anyway.

LEOLA. Lucille! (*With some little surprise.*)

LUCILLE. You're not anxious to see him, are you?

LEOLA. He's always been very kind and pleasant to me.

LUCILLE. He's a failure all around. His play was a fisle. They shelved it after the first week.

LEOLA. I thought it was clever. The people didn't appreciate its real value. It was too heavy for them that's all.

LUCILLE. That's his second failure.

LEOLA. I'm sorry he didn't succeed, and I hope he don't give up.

LUCILLE. Poor fellow, I really ought to feel sorry for him, too.

LEOLA. He's done you a great honor and you really ought to at least sympathize with him.

LUCILLE. I pray you, what honor.

LEOLA. He's asked you to be his wife.

LUCILLE. (*Laughs.*) The idiot.

LEOLA. Not for asking you, I'm sure.

LUCILLE. Certainly not. Quite the reverse. He's done you the same honor and I suppose by this time he has honored one or two more.

Re-enters TED with two vases.

TED. These large enough?

LUCILLE. Yes, plenty. (*Takes a vase and arranges flowers.*)

LEOLA. (*Same play.*)

Enters WILL from right.

WILL. Hello, girls.

LUCILLE. (*Somewhat frightened; turns.*) Will, where did you come from?

WILL. The office.

LUCILLE. How did you get in here?

WILL. Your door was wide open. I thought I'd take you by surprise. (*Observing room.*) My, but you've got things in tip-top shape.

LUCILLE. Yes, thanks to Ted.

WILL. Oh—been here all day, Ted?

TED. Part of the afternoon only.

LUCILLE. Accept my thanks, Will, for these flowers. (*She places them on table right.*)

WILL. Not at all—a mere trifle. (*He crosses to TED and shakes hands.*)

LEOLA. Shall I leave these flowers where they are?

LUCILLE. Yes, they look pretty there.

TED. When do we eat?

LUCILLE. Oh, you poor, dear boy, you must be nearly starved; you really earned a good, square meal, but I'm afraid you'll have to be content with a cold luncheon and hot coffee.

TED. Anything at all so long as it is eatable.

LUCILLE. I'll go right in now and prepare something.

LEOLA. I'll fix the table in the meantime.

LUCILLE. You'll find some cigarettes in that black box on the mantel-piece. (*They exit.*)

TED. Thanks. (*Crosses to box on mantel-piece and takes a cigarette.*) Have one, Will?

WILL. Yes. (*Lights cigarette.*) I see your favorite mare lost every heat in the races yesterday afternoon.

TED. Yes, damn the luck!

WILL. Did you lose very much?

TED. No, just a few hundred.

WILL. You've been hit rather hard lately. I thought your losses at the suburban put a finishing touch to your desire to play the races.

TED. Well, I did want to cut it out, but I managed to get good odds, and I was almost sure of the long end of the stake.

WILL. You received a friendly tip, I suppose.

TED. Yes, he seemed to know the whole record and pedigree

of the mare.

WILL. That's the way the professional gamblers work their game. The tip is their bate—they themselves play the other way. Unless you have money to lose and a mind of your own, I'd advise you to quit the game.

TED. I've cut it ought for good now.

WILL. I'm glad to hear it. The sooner you quit trying to recuperate your losses by continuing this game of chance and deception, the quicker you'll increase your bank account.

TED. (*Bites nervously at his cigarette.*) Damn this stringency in the money market. (*Takes another cigarette and lights it.*)

WILL. What's Tom working so hard for these days?

TED. I don't know.

WILL. He works until nine nearly every evening at the office and then goes home and writes until midnight. He hasn't been out one night in the last two weeks that I know of. What's keeping him at the office, Ted?

TED. (*Thoughtfully.*) I don't know. Who told you that he was putting in overtime?

WILL. He did. I thought you knew.

TED. He leaves at his usual hour every evening.

WILL. For something to eat, I suppose.

TED. (*Looks nervously at time-piece.*) You think he's there tonight?

WILL. I suppose so.

TED. Is your machine down stairs?

WILL. Yes, my runabout.

TED. Can I use it for half an hour?

WILL. Yes, I'll be here for half an hour anyway.

TED. Thank you. (*Crosses toward exit right.*)

Enters LEOLA from left.

LEOLA. Luncheon is ready. (*To Will.*) Will you join us?

WILL. Just to be sociable, I'll take a dematasse with my smoke.

TED. You'll have to excuse me, Leola, I'll be back in a little while.

LEOLA. I thought you were hungry.

TED. Oh, I was just joking. It won't take but a few minutes.

LEOLA. It's all ready for you. You really must eat before you go.

WILL. What's your hurry, Ted?

TED. It's a little matter of business.

WILL. Business oughtn't worry you at this hour of the day.

LEOLA. I insist that you eat first. A few minutes later won't make very much difference.

TED. (*Looks at time-piece.*) Well, I guess I can spare a few minutes. (*Crosses right.*)

Door bell rings.

LEOLA. Lucille is waiting for you in the dining room. Tell her I'm answering the bell. (*She exits left. They exist right. Slight pause.*)

Re-enters LEOLA, followed by TOM.

LEOLA. Your just in time for supper.

TOM. I've had mine, thank you.

LEOLA. Won't you join us in a cup of coffee?

TOM. I couldn't eat a morsel or drink a drop if I tried. I'm forced to refuse, though with great reluctance.

LEOLA. Join us in conversation then.

TOM. If you don't mind, I'd just as soon pass the time looking at the exhibit. You've certainly got a splendid collection. I'm anxious to view them separately.

LEOLA. You'll excuse me then. We'll be through very soon.

TOM. Don't hurry on my account. I'll be very well entertained. (*She exits. He looks at pictures crossing slowly toward the vase containing the American beauties. While passing he smells of them, taking a deep breath, sighing audibly as he does so. He then crosses to table and views the pictures on the wall right, his hand resting on a book lying on the table. His eyes drop toward the book, he picks it up and pages it until he comes*

across two envelopes.. Their discovery surprise him. He takes a letter from one of the envelopes and reads it. Slight pause. The hand bearing the letter drops to the table and he assumes a stern and bitter expression. After slight pause he places the letters in his pocket and resumes viewing the pictures.

Enters TED from right.

TED. Good evening, Tom.

TOM. *(Turning.)* Good evening, Ted.

TED. How is it you're not working tonight?

TOM. I've finished the job. That's one reason why I'm here. I've come to see you more than anyone else.

TED. What about?

TOM. I don't care to discuss the matter in this house. I must see you, however, alone tonight at my home.

TED. What for?

TOM. That's a subject we'll discuss later.

TED. I expect to be quite busy here tonight.

TOM. You can do exactly as you choose, but as a friend of yours, I would advise you to come and see me tonight.

TED. Why tonight?

TOM. Because one can never tell what may happen tomorrow.

TED. I'm afraid I don't understand you.

TOM. *(At his side.)* The bank examiners are due at the office in the morning. *(Ted steps back in surprise.)* That's all I will say just now. You will come—tonight?

TED. Yes—. *(He crosses right.)*

Enters WILL from right, meeting TED at door. TED exits.

WILL. *(Coming down.)* What's the matter with Ted?

TOM. I don't know.

WILL. He's nervous and flushed. He was hungry fifteen minutes ago and when he sat down to luncheon the food he placed into his mouth wouldn't fill the cavity in my wisdom tooth.

TOM. Slightly indisposed, I presume.

WILL. By-the-by Tom, has Leola broken the news.

TOM. What news?

WILL. She didn't tell you then?

TOM. Nothing that would cause me to be doubtful as to what you mean.

WILL. Ted and she are— (*Hesitates.*) I believe I'll let Leola tell you.

TOM. (*Apprehending. In complete surprise.*) Engaged? Ted and Leola—engaged to be married?

WILL. Yes.

TOM. When did they announce it.

WILL. Not five minutes ago. (*At his side.*) I'm sorry, Tom.

TOM. I'm sorry too—for her. As for myself, I've never been very fortunate. I tried cards once and nearly lost everything I owned. I tested the maxim—"Unlucky at cards, lucky in love"—and failed at that. God knows I love her dearly! It's mighty hard to be a loser all around.

WILL. Your luck may take a turn suddenly.

TOM. What—in cards?

WILL. All around, I mean. Leola is coming; I'll leave you alone with her. (*Exits right.*)

LEOLA *enters from left.*

LEOLA. How do you like the exhibit?

TOM. It's immense, Leola. Your work is deserving of higher honors.

LEOLA. What do you mean by "higher honors"?

TOM. The prices you have labeled them with are altogether too low. I've seen pictures of less artistic value command fifty times the price you ask for many equally as good. Your technic and originality of expression in that Venician painting is marvelous.

LEOLA. You are flattering the exhibit.

TOM. You are doubting my sincerity. I can't blame you however. With all the things you heard about me, it must be hard for you to take me seriously.

LEOLA. You take offense so easily.

TOM. Not by choice, I assure you, Leola. Your paintings are works of art and I think they are very beautiful and artistic.

LEOLA. It's very kind of you to say so.

TOM. I haven't noticed any of Lucille's work.

LEOLA. There are several of her paintings in this room. That country scene in the corner is one of her's.

TOM. (*Looking at it.*) Pretty good work for a beginner.

LEOLA. That's not her best work. She has several prettier paintings in the other room. Do you want to see them?

TOM. Yes—in just a minute. I want to see you first. (*Leola crosses down; Tom follows.*) Leola— (*Takes hold of her ring hand. He speaks slowly, pausing after each sentence.*) I have often taken the liberty of placing your hand in mine. You have challenged my sincerity of doing so several times. I felt sure I could convince you that I always was most sincere. I tried hard to make you believe in me. This ring tells me that I have failed.

LEOLA. I do believe in you, Tom.

TOM. I've lost you, Leola, and with it I've lost my hope in life. (*Drops her hand.*)

LEOLA. (*Turning to him; sympathetically.*) Tom.

TOM. Leola, I'm not doing this for effect or for sympathy. I want you to know the truth, that's all. (*Slight pause.*) Lucille told you that I proposed to her a year ago, didn't she?

LEOLA. Yes.

TOM. She also told you that I was fickle.

LEOLA. Yes, I believe she did.

TOM. That's something I admire in you.

LEOLA. What—that I am fickle?

TOM. No, no, Leola—your honest and ready response.

LEOLA. (*Smiling faintly.*) Oh!

TOM. She told you too, I believe, about a certain other love affair of mine.

LEOLA. Yes.

TOM. I don't know why she told you all these things. It's

true that I loved several times, but I was never fickle. In meeting you my whole life seemed to change. I never knew a greater, a purer love in my life!

LEOLA. I'm so sorry, Tom.

TOM. I don't want you to be sorry. I just want you to know that I am not nearly as bad as they would have me. (*Extending his hand.*) Leola, I wish you joy and happiness in boundless measure.

LEOLA. Thank you, Tom.

TOM. Now, I'll look at the pictures in the other room.

LEOLA. (*Crosses toward door left, followed by Tom.*) I'm sure you'll like Lucille's work.

Enters TED from left; he is very nervous; crosses to humidor and takes a cigarette. Enters WILL from right.

TED. Will, you're just the man I want to see.

WILL. Do you want some money?

TED. How did you guess?

WILL. By your singular manner of approach.

TED. I don't like to borrow money from my friends; I would much prefer to go outside, but I have no security to offer.

WILL. How much do you want?

TED. Five thousand.

WILL. (*Surprised.*) Five thousand! What on earth do you intend to do with all this money?

TED. Can't you make it?

WILL. Not in ready cash.

TED. How much can you spare? I'll give you eight per cent.

WILL. It isn't the per cent that is worrying me, Ted. I'm seriously considering getting married, and I'll need some ready cash myself.

TED. Oh, are you engaged to ——?

WILL. (*Interrupting.*) Not so loud.

TED. Is that a fact?

WILL. Not yet, but I hope to make it a fact before the evening is over.

TED. I need the money badly, Will; in fact, I'll need some tonight. I must raise it somewhere.

WILL. Must raise it—why?

TED. Oh, I can't explain. I just simply must have the money. I'll make it all good and right. If I'd have the time I'd get it from my dad, but he's out of town. I'll make it all right long before you ever need it, Will.

WILL. I haven't got the cash with me, so I couldn't make it tonight anyway.

TED. A check will do.

WILL. I haven't got a black check with me.

TED. Where do you bank.

WILL. Fourth National.

TED. (*Taking a blank check from pocket.*) Here is a check on the First National, change the First to the Fourth. That'll fix it. I'll give you an "I owe you." Will you trust me?

WILL. (*Sits.*) I'm always willing to help a friend in need. I'd like to do it to the full extent, but I'm afraid I can't spare more than three thousand. (*Writes.*)

TED. I'll manage to get the balance all right. (*Sits and writes an "I owe you."*)

WILL. (*Looking up.*) Are you in trouble?

TED. (*Faining surprise.*) Why no, Will. What makes you ask?

WILL. I only wanted to make sure. It's my money, you know.

TED. Your money is safe all right.

WILL. I don't doubt that, but I'm just giving it on an "I owe you." Outside of our friendship and our trusting one another, that isn't worth the paper its written on.

TED. Well, if you don't trust me, of course that's different.

WILL. That isn't the point. I'm usually very careful how and where I invest my money. I worked mighty hard for the little I've got. In exchange for my generosity I only ask you to tell me what you intend to use it for. Not an unreasonable request, I'm sure.

TED. Well, to be frank with you, Leola wants it. I told her I'd get it for her the first thing in the morning. She wants to pay off a mortgage on her property.

WILL. That isn't such an awfull thing to make such a fuss over.

TED. No, of course not, but then, you see I always had lots of money and I don't want her to know that I'm all in just now. In a year or so I'll be on my feet again.

WILL. Here; she'll never know you got the money from me.

TED. Thanks, Will. I'll pay it back with good interest in a very short time.

Enters LUCILLE from left.

LUCILLE. Leola has some work for you, Ted.

TED. Oh, all right. *(He exits left.)*

WILL. Anything I can do?

LUCILLE. Not just now. Something may turn up later.

WILL. I'll hang around and wait until later then. In the meantime I want to talk to you about ourselves.

LUCILLE. How interesting that will be *(Sits.)*

WILL. Who will we discuss first?

LUCILLE. Begin with yourself. Possibly we won't get any farther.

WILL. That's easy. I'll give you myself in a nut-shell. *(Sits.)* I'm a young man of twenty-eight, dark complected, rather regular features, some say angelic, others would make me course, but I've compromised with the term "regular features." I'm proprietor of a profitable business, own two automobiles, have been in love several times—though, sad to say, in vain. My heart has survived all wounds thus affected and is again vigorously engaged in the same business. Am willing to share all of the assets I possess with a suitable partner.

LUCILLE. Is that all.

WILL. That's all the nut-shell holds. *(Rises.)* As for yourself, I can squeeze everything in a one-kernel peanut shell. *(He leans over her shoulder and speaks close to her face.)* Your the

fairest, sweetest, dearest girl I ever loved, and I want you for my wife.

LUCILLE. (*Rising.*) Why Will, I really believe you are proposing to me?

WILL. I hope I did. I intended it for a proposal.

LUCILLE. Your intentions are good, but really I can't consider your offer just now. I've turned down a dozen men within the last month, so you see you're not the first.

WILL. Lucille, I love you. (*He makes a move toward her.*)

LUCILLE. I will say that I care more for your company than that of any other man I know, but I'm happy as I am. I don't see why I should tie up with any one man just yet. So let's forget it for a while.

Door bell rings.

LUCILLE. The ferns at last. You may help me carry them in. (*She exits right; he follows; they re-enter each carrying a fern.*)

WILL. Where do you want them?

LUCILLE. Right here. (*Sets fern down center.*) We'll place them afterwards. (*Exits Will follows.*)

WILL. (*Re-enters with another fern.*) I didn't play the right card, but I will yet.

LUCILLE. (*Enters with another fern.*) You're slow, there are two more.

WILL. That's easy, I thought there were a dozen. (*Exits.*)

LUCILLE. No, I said a dozen proposals.

WILL. (*Re-enters carrying two ferns.*) I'll promise you that the second dozen will be all of the same kind without variation.

LUCILLE. That'll be exciting. Place those two ferns in the other room while I arrange these in here.

WILL. (*Crosses to door left.*) And I'll start the second dozen tonight. (*Exits.*)

LUCILLE starts to place the ferns.. Enters TOM from left. He crosses towards door right.

LUCILLE. You're going rather early.

TOM. I remained longer than I expected.

LUCILLE. (*Coming down center.*) I suppose you heard about Leola and Ted.

TOM. Yes.

LUCILLE. Quite a surprise, wasn't it? (*Tom is visibly affected.*) Ted's a fine fellow, don't you think so?

TOM. Yes.

LUCILLE. He's very good-looking too.

TOM. There's no doubt about that.

LUCILLE. They're going to be married next month. (*Tom remain motionless.*) I suppose you'll be at the wedding? (*Same play.*) Leola thought that you might refuse if she'd ask you to act as best man.

TOM. (*Turning toward her.*) Are you trying to humiliate me?

LUCILLE. Why no! What makes you think so?

TOM. I doubt whether Leola ever discussed her plans of marriage with you.

LUCILLE. Why, you don't mean to say that I am lying?

TOM. Shall I call Leola and ask her?

LUCILLE. (*Indifferently.*) You can do as you please.

TOM. (*Crosses toward door left.*)

LUCILLE. You're not going to call her and make a scene.

TOM. Not unless circumstances are such as to develop the scene: (*Turns toward door.*)

LUCILLE. (*Pleadingly.*) Don't call her! Please don't!

TOM. Why not?

LUCILLE. Because she may not like it that I discussed this subject with you.

TOM. Why did you do it then?

LUCILLE. Well, I didn't think you—you'd doubt me, and—

TOM. (*Continuing.*) Go to the trouble to learn the truth. Isn't that it?

LUCILLE. No, certainly not!

TOM. (*Coming down.*) Did you ever mention anything to her about the letter I wrote you?

LUCILLE. What letter?

TOM. The last one.

LUCILLE. No.

TOM. You're quite sure?

LUCILLE. Of course I am.

TOM. Leola told me you did.

LUCILLE. (*As though recollecting.*) I—I think she asked me about a letter once.

TOM. What letter?

LUCILLE. None in particular. She just happened to ask whether you ever corresponded with me.

TOM. Why did you just *happen* to show her the letter in question.

LUCILLE. I didn't show her. We just talked about it.

TOM. She told me that she read the letter.

LUCILLE. She must be mistaken. I—I burned it the very day I received it.

TOM. It must have been fire-proof.

LUCILLE. You're insulting me.

TOM. You're not on the square, Lucille!

LUCILLE. You're trying to make a lie out of everything I say.

TOM. I've all but produced the evidence, and I don't like to do that unless I'm forced to do it. You didn't burn that letter, did you?

LEOLA. I did!

TOM. When?

LUCILLE. Immediately after I read it.

TOM. You're quite sure then?

LUCILLE. Yes.

TOM. You know, Lucille, I often wished that I had never told you what I did in that letter. No news would have pleased me more than to know that you really had destroyed it.

LUCILLE. Well, I did, and I suppose you're satisfied.

TOM. I'd rather it were so. (*He takes a letter from his*

pocket.) Here is Exhibit A. (*Gives it to her.*)

LUCILLE. (*Takes the letter and opens it nervously.*) Where did you get this?

TOM. From amongst a lot of burned paper.

LUCILLE. That's not the letter I destroyed.

TOM. I only wrote two letters to you in all my life. Isn't that so?

LUCILLE. Yes, but the other one contained—well you know.

TOM. Oh! That's the one you burned up.

LUCILLE. Yes.

TOM. (*Producing the other letter.*) Exhibit B—the other letter—quite unburned at that—and not asbestos either. (*Opens it.*) You did show it to her!

LUCILLE. No!

TOM. She knows enough about it. You might just as well have shown it to her. (*Reads.*) "I never knew what love meant until I met you"! Isn't that a pretty line? It came from my heart, Lucille! "My heart bears heavily on my pen, and were I to write what each beat whispers into my ear I would be repeating at every stroke of the pen, "I love you, I love you, I love you"! I thought I knew and understood you, but I was much mistaken. You resented my confession of love—you played me for more than a year—you boasted of your many admirers, and you all but snapped your very finger in my face, because I had nothing more to offer than my love! You unmasked yourself then and there! I awakened from my elusive dream! To think that I meant all this! (*Pointing at letter.*) Weak expressions of a mere infatuation for a pretty face—that's all—a mere weak infatuation! And now that I have found the one girl in all the world whom I could really love—a love that is pure and everlasting—you—you come between that love as a law-prowling thief and steal the very essence of my existence! (*Lucille throws herself weeping on the sofa*) Lies! lies! lies! Nothing but lies!

LUCILLE. Don't, don't! You are treating me cruelly!

TOM. Cruelly, yes! You are not worthy better treatment.

You have played your little game of treachery, and I mean to strike back blow for blow and bring each lie of yours to bear on your conscience—your very life!

LUCILLE. Tom, I beg of you, don't, don't! (*She takes hold of his hand pleadingly.*)

LEOLA *enters on scene from left.*

LEOLA. (*In doubtful surprise.*) Lucille! Tom!

LUCILLE. (*Same play.*) Don't, don't!

LUCILLE *turns away from Leola, who has advanced toward them.*

TOM. (*Turning toward Leola.*) Oh, I didn't know you were here.

LEOLA. What's happened?

TOM. Happened? (*He looks at Lucille, who looks pleadingly at him. To Leola.*) Why, nothing happened. We—that is Lucille and I were just rehearsing a certain heavy scene in my new play.

LEOLA. (*Brightening.*) Oh, how perfectly fine! Do it over again. I want to hear it all.

TOM. It's quite a trying scene and I'm afraid we've exhausted ourselves. Don't you think Lucille retains a natural pose of the character she is portraying?

LEOLA. Yes, indeed. I've always told her she ought to study for the stage. (*Lucille grasps the situation and forces a smile.*)

TOM. (*To Leola.*) I believe I said good-night some time ago. I really must go now. (*Extending hand.*) Good-night.

LEOLA. (*Takes his hand.*) Good-night, Tom.

TOM. Good-night, Lucille. (*Extending hand.*)

LUCILLE. (*Takes his hand warmly.*) Good-night.

TOM. (*After crossing to door right, turns.*) I wish you both great success in your venture! (*He exits while the curtain drops.*)

CURTAIN.

THE THIRD ACT.

The scene represents the interior of Thomas Erford's Study. The wall to the left of the stage is occupied by a medium-sized fire-place. The furniture is in mission style. A flat desk and chair occupy the right center of the room. An electric library lamp is on the desk. Several combination book-cases filled with books occupy the space against the right wall and part way along the back wall to the right.. There is a door in wall right and another in the back wall; an oil painting is hung upon the back wall; several chairs are tastefully arranged; a telephone is on the wall right. The room is dark at the rise of the curtain. TOM enters from door center, takes off his coat and hat and lays them carefully on a chair. He crosses slowly toward the desk and turns on the electric lamp. He gazes blankly into vacancy, his eyes finally closing, while his hand moves slowly over his heart; all of which indicates that he is in a state of great dejection.

TOM. (*Sinks into his chair and whispers audibly.*) Leola, I love you—I love you! (*After slight pause he opens the drawer in the desk and takes out his manuscript. After paging it for several moments he stops abruptly. He leans forward and clasps his hands as though in prayer.*) Oh God Almighty—father who art in heaven, listen to my prayer! Thou knowest the deep-felt sorrow of my heart—the pangs and anguish of my suffering soul! I have nothing to work or live for in the future; Thou gavest me a heart to love and I have lost it! Death would I gladly cherish to life. Oh God, if Thou will grant me just one year of success in the work I have started—cheerfully at its expiration—at the very hour, I will surrender my soul to Thee! Gladly and without fear of death, I await Thy guidance and Thy will! Amen!

MRS. ERFORD *enters from door left during the above prayer.*

MRS. ERFORD. (*At his side.*) Were you praying, my son, or

reading from your manuscript?

TOM. I was only sililoquizing, mother.

MRS. ERFORD. In what way?

TOM. I often do that before I place it on paper. (*Writes.*) I thought you were in bed.

MRS. ERFORD. I waited for you.

TOM. Why waite for me; I'm no child.

MRS. ERFORD. I didn't wait on that account; I stayed up purposely to see to it that you would get to bed at a reasonable hour tonight. You're killing yourself working so hard, Tom.

TOM. This is play, mother.

MRS. ERFORD. You never listen to what I say; you need the rest and the sleep.

TOM. (*Looking at watch.*) It's only half past ten now.

MRS. ERFORD. Your mind needs a rest. All day long you are wrestling with figures, and then at night you sit here thinking and thinking.

TOM. You do the same; you sit here night after night and read. You must think while you read. I prefer writing to reading; I find as much joy in developing a plot as you do in following it while you read.

MRS. ERFORD. You simply won't listen to me.

TOM. To please you, mother, I'll discontinue writing tonight. (*Rises.*) Now, you go to bed and don't worry about me. I expect a caller this evening. If the door bell rings, don't let it disturb you. Good-night. (*Kisses her.*)

MRS. ERFORD. Good-night, Tom. Don't think I'm trying to discourage you; I don't want you to overdo it, that's all.

TOM. I understand.

MRS. ERFORD. Whom do you expect at this late hour?

TOM. Mr. Wilbur. It's a matter of business.

MRS. ERFORD. Don't stay up too long, and don't smoke any more cigars. (*Exits left.*)

TOM. I won't. Good-night. (*Sits. He places his hand into his coat-pocket and finds the letter used in Act II. He tears*

it to pieces, rises, crosses to fire-place and throws them into the flames. Door bell rings. He crosses to talking tube to left of door center. Talking into tube.) Hello! (Listen for a moment; then talk into tube.) Yes, I'm alone, come right up. (He crosses down center, bearing an expression of doubtful surprise. He places his manuscript into the desk drawer and re-crosses to door center and opens it. Slight pause. Talking off right.) This way, Lucille. (He opens door wide and steps back.) (Enters Lucille.)

LUCILLE. (Grasping Tom's hand warmly upon entering.) Tom, I want to thank you first of all.

TOM. Anyone escort you? (Closes door.)

LUCILLE. No.

TOM. (Coming down.) Be seated. (Offers chair.)

LUCILLE. (Sits.) You're surprised to see me here, I presume?

TOM. I am, indeed. (Sits.) You followed me rather quickly.

LUCILLE. I came on the subway express. I made good connections. (Pause; hesitating.) I—I don't know just how I should explain my visit at this late hour; I might have waited until tomorrow, but there's something seemed to tell me that I should go that very moment. Well, I'm here, and I suppose I—I must tell you why.

TOM. I'll leave that to you.

LUCILLE. You don't intend to change your mind?

TOM. In what way?

LUCILLE. You're not going to tell Leola or Will about tonight?

TOM. I haven't thought about that. I may have been mistaken.

LUCILLE. I don't want you to tell them—I don't want them to know.

TOM. Then I am *not* mistaken?

LUCILLE. You won't tell them, promise me?

TOM. If I had had such intentions I would have availed myself of that opportunity tonight.

LUCILLE. I was afraid you would write her a letter of explanation.

TOM. Matters are bad enough as they are. (*Bell rings.*) Excuse me. (*He crosses to tube.*) Hello! (*Listens. Then into tube.*) Yes, the door is open. (*To Lucille.*) Quick, Lucille, into this room. (*Crosses quickly toward door right.*)

LUCILLE. Who is it. (*Runs.*)

TOM. It's Will.

LUCILLE. How did he guess? (*Crosses right.*) Can I leave by the rear door?

TOM. You won't be able to find the way.

LUCILLE. (*At door.*) Don't tell him.

TOM. I promise. (*She exits, closing door.*) (*Tom crosses toward desk.*)

Enters WILL, rather hurriedly and somewhat excited.

WILL. Have you seen Lucille?

TOM. Yes.

WILL. Where is she?

TOM. Where is she? Why—I saw her last at her home.

WILL. She's gone.

TOM. (*In apparent surprise.*) Gone?

WILL. Yes.

TOM. Gone where?

WILL. That's what I'm trying to find out. She wanted to get some wire to hang picture. I offered to get it for her. She insisted upon going herself, however, explaining that I wouldn't get the right kind. I then proposed to take her to the store in my machine. She consented, but before I could put on my hat and coat she disappeared. I followed and saw her enter the subway and board a south-bound express. Having failed to overtake here, I returned to her apartment.

TOM. Are you out hunting for her?

WILL. Yes.

TOM. Do you expect to find her?

WILL. I haven't the remotest idea where to look for her.

TOM. You certainly didn't expect to find her here, did you?

WILL. Leola suggested that I call on you; that's why I'm here.

TOM. A strange suggestion for her to offer.

WILL. I thought so too.

TOM. You might have known better.

WILL. That's true, too, but possibly you can offer a suggestion as to where she may be.

TOM. Home, by this time, where else?

WILL. I doubt it. There's a hardware store not three squares away. Why should she take the subway—the express at that.

TOM. She hasn't been living there very long. Possibly she didn't know a store was so close at hand.

WILL. That may be. I'll drive back to her apartment.
(*Starts up center.*)

TOM. Do you intend to take Leola home in your machine?

WILL. Yes, Ted suggested that I take her home.

TOM. How soon will that be?

WILL. If Lucille has returned we'll leave very soon after I get there.

TOM. (*Taking watch from pocket.*) In possibly twenty minutes, then?

WILL. Yes, if Lucille is home.

TOM. Will you drive by here on your way?

WILL. Yes.

TOM. Leola is very anxious to see that painting there (*Pointing to picture on wall.*), by Jules Girardet. If she desires to step in and look at it tonight I will be pleased to show it to her.

WILL. I'll tell her about it, Tom. Good-night.

TOM. Good-night, Will. (*Will exits; Tom crosses to door right and opens it.*) Lucille!

LUCILLE. (*Entering.*) I heard everything he said; I can't imagine why Leola sent him here.

TOM. It's not very clear to me either. Have you a telephone?

LUCILLE. Yes.

TOM. Ring up Leola and tell her you will be home presently. Make an excuse for staying away so long. The 'phone is over there. (*Pointing left to 'phone.*)

LUCILLE. (*Crosses to 'phone and places receiver to ear.*) Grand Central 2456. (*Pause.*)

TOM. Don't forget to tell her that the store was closed.

LUCILLE. Hello! Leola? (*Slight pause.*) Yes— (*Pause.*) Lost—why? (*Pause.*) Who is— Will? (*Pause.*) Why, how perfectly ridiculous. (*Pause.*) No, the stores are closed. I'll have Will get some the very first thing in the morning. (*Pause.*) He will if I tell him. (*Pause.*) In ten minutes. (*Pause.*) Yes, it's rather late. He'll take you home in his outo. (*Pause.*) Yes, I'll hurry. Good-by. (*Hangs up receiver.*)

TOM. (*Crosses to door center.*) Leave by the side door to your right.

LUCILLE. (*At his side.*) You must never tell Will of my visit tonight.

TOM. I promise not to breathe a word of anything that transpired this evening.

LUCILLE. I thank you, Tom. (*Extending hand; Tom takes it.*) I—I never really appreciated the value of sincerity like yours until tonight. I never saw life before as I see it now.

TOM. Love is a mighty big thing after all. Life is so empty, so crude, so worthless without it. (*Door bell rings.*) Just a minute, Lucille. (*Crosses to tube.*) Hello! (*Listens.*) Yes, take the elevator. (*Listens for a second, then to Lucille.*) Leave by the side door. It's a friend of yours and mine. I know you wouldn't want him to see you.

LUCILLE. Is it Will?

TOM. No, you must hurry.

LUCILLE. Good-night. (*Exits.*)

TOM. Good-night, Lucille.

(*Tom closes the door and crosses toward his desk. He takes a portfolio from his inside vest-pocket and looks around the room,*

finally he crosses to the mantle-piece and lays it next to the humidor; he starts back, but again recrosses and puts the portfolio on top of the humidor. He recrosses to the desk and seats himself. A rap is heard on the door center.)

TOM. Come in!

(Ted enters and crosses down center.)

TOM. Take off your coat; it's rather warm in here. *(He takes off his coat.)* Hang it on the chair. *(He does, and then crosses down towards Tom.)* Sit down, Ted.

TED. *(Sits.)* Who authorized you to make a secret examination of my records?

TOM. Nobody. My position commands that privilege.

TED. You had better not say anything to the faculty before the bank examiners have made a more thorough examination.

TOM. In other words, you mean to question my ability as a man of figures?

TED. That will be proven after the audit.

TOM. I'm very sorry, Ted, that you are taking so bold a stand against yourself.

TED. You have a fine way of saying things. Why don't you come out with the truth and say that you've been trying to launch some substantial accusation against my character. Your entire time has been devoted to this sort of thing ever since you realized that I was your rival for the hand of Leola.

TOM. My action was not prompted by any personal affair. My suspicion was aroused by the careless manner in which you spent your money. The first inkling of your defalcation came to me more by accident than by a desire to detect. That memorandum charge against Fealy-Moore & Co. for eight hundred dollars is only one out of ten similar fictitious charges.

TED. They are not fictitious; a check deposited by them for that amount was returned on account of "no funds."

TOM. I have substantial proof that it is fictitious. I didn't expect an argument on this score. When you entered here this evening, the first thing you said referred to your shortage. How

did you know the nature of your call?

TED. You insinuated in that direction.

TOM. I simply told you that the bank examiners would be at the office in the morning.

TED. Why did you insist upon seeing me this evening?

TOM. I didn't insist; I left it to your own good judgment. I intended to tell you everything when we met at Lucille's, but I realized your great embarrassment.

TED. You were mistaken.

TOM. And yet you trembled like a leaf.

TED. (*Forcing a smile.*) Ha!

TOM. Ted, I'm not going to try to get the truth from you by lies. I'll treat the matter openly. The bank examiners will not be at the office tomorrow. I simply used that lie to make you understand why I desired to see you.

TED. I knew that myself.

TOM. Be informed, however, that I will be at the office very early myself.

TED. That's your business.

TOM. For God's sake, Ted, don't make it so hard for me to help you. (*Ted becomes uneasy.*) Do you for one minute presume that I am trying to come between you and Leola—that I am doing this to further my own interest? If so, you are greatly mistaken. My purpose of requesting you here is to arrange some way to make the defalcation good. You will soon become the husband of the sweetest and dearest girl in all New York, and I would very much hate to see her dragged into disgrace when there is still ample time to prevent it. Your action tonight will either make me your defendant or the plaintiff. Which shall it be?

TED. You'll be in a better position to determine that in the morning.

TOM. (*Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket.*) Remember, I'll be down very early. (*Shows him the keys.*)

TED. (*With surprise.*) How did you get them? (*Feeling in his pockets.*)

TOM. In very much the same manner you got the money.

TED. You stole them!

TOM. That's a rather broad term. I didn't incriminate you of stealing the money. I simply said you took it. Of course, you intend putting it back again. I, too, do not care to keep these keys after tomorrow morning.

TED. What is your game? (*Grasping the keys.*)

TOM. You don't mean to tell me you're from Missouri. (*Jerks them away.*) Who loaned you the money?

TED. What money?

TOM. The money with which you intend to lift the forged papers?

TED. (*Leaning over table.*) Will you help me?

TOM. For the sake of the girl you love—for the sake of the girl who loves you, I'll do all I can to shield you.

TED. I did take several thousand, but by tomorrow I'll have everything made good.

TOM. You have made it very hard for me to assist you. Why didn't you open up like a man and tell me the truth?

TED. I hoped to have everything in an undetectable shape by the early morning.

TOM. You have the money, then.

TED. Yes.

TOM. Here are the keys. (*Gives them to him.*) Remember, I am doing this at the cost of my position.

TED. I've always been damn jealous of you, Tom. I couldn't help it. I just had to win her or die.

TOM. I have lived up to my agreement; I've stepped aside and left the field clear for you. I never-the-less still love her and by the memory of that love I mean to see her supremely happy. Do you know in what way I mean?

TED. Yes.

TOM. She loves you, Ted, and I want you to make her happy. That's why I offer my assistance now. You must prove yourself worthy of her in every way.

TED. I will, after this.

TOM. I brought several of the valueless papers with me to use as evidence in case I needed them. I'll give them to you. You can destroy them the first thing in the morning. (*Rises and crosses to door right.*) You will find some cigars in the humidor on the mantle-piece. (*Exits.*)

(*Ted remains motionless for a few moments, apparently in deep thought. He rises suddenly and walks nervously up center. He then crosses left to mantle-piece. After laying the portfolio to one side he takes a cigar from the humidor and lights it. His eyes become fixed on the portfolio. He turns and looks toward the door right. Upon seeing that he is still alone he opens the portfolio and takes a roll of bills from it and places them in his pocket. Tom re-enters with an envelope.*)

TOM. (*At his desk.*) Here they are. (*Hands them to him.*)

TED. (*Takes them.*) I'll destroy them now. (*Movement as though to tear the envelope.*)

TOM. (*Stopping him.*) Check them over first.

TED. I don't think it's necessary. (*He places it in his pocket.*)

TOM. You are complimenting my ability now. (*Starting toward left.*) How do you like that cigar?

TED. Somewhat strong for me. (*He watches Tom anxiously.*)

TOM. (*Places portfolio to one side, feeling of it while doing so. He opens the humidor and takes a cigar.*) How did you manage to get all the money in so short a time?

TED. My father will make it good.

TOM. Oh. (*Lights cigar.*)

TED. (*In an effort to attract his attention elsewhere.*) That's a very fine oil painting. By whom is it?

TOM. (*Crosses to his side.*) That's by Jules Gerordet. Leola admires his work very much.

TED. Yes, she has two of his paintings.

TOM. Let's get back to our first subject.

TED. It's rather late. I—I think we understand each other.

TOM. An unexpected change has taken place.

TED. (*Doubtfully.*) Change?

TOM. Yes, I cannot offer you my assistance.

TED. (*Nervously.*) Why—what—?

TOM. You are not possessed of the qualities to reform.

TED. What—what do you mean?

TOM. (*Directly in front of him.*) You were merely a defaulter until tonight; now you are a thief!

TED. (*Aghast.*) Tom!

TOM. Ted, I was in hopes my test would fail; I saw you take the money from that portfolio!

TED. What money?

TOM. For God's sake, Ted, don't deny it! Place your hand in that pocket. (*Points to pocket in coat. Ted places his hand into the pocket.*) Give it to me!

TED. (*Gives him the money.*) I don't know why I did it!

TOM. (*Takes it.*) Why didn't you tell me you needed the money?

TED. I don't know, Tom, I don't know why I took it—I don't know!

TOM. It's the same old story: The habit is easily acquired after it is once started.

TED. I'll never do it again; I'm through with it—I'm done with it!

TOM. For how long?

TED. For good—for always!

TOM. And you are the choice of the girl I love. A thief, a bold, every-day, low, common thief, the fiancée of one of the fairest young women in the world?

TED. Don't, don't! I'm done with it for good—for good!

TOM. Once a thief, always a thief!

TED. No, no, no!

TOM. Yes! Yes! What proof—what assurance—what trust can so weak a man as you offer now. You have destroyed the last bit of confidence I had in you. A thief is also a liar by reason of his profession; you didn't win Leola over me by fair

means!

TED. Leola loves me!

TOM. Would she love you if she knew you as I do, would she love you then? (*Ted drops his head*) No! Every spark of love she ever had for you would vanish! Why deceive her?

TED. (*Appealingly.*) Tom, I love her!

TOM. I love her too! And I'm not going to allow a man of your calibre to cheat me out of so great a claim!

(*Door bell rings. He crosses to talking tube.*) Hello! (*Listens.*) Yes, come right up with her.

TED. Who's there?

TOM. Leola and Will.

TED. (*In complete surprise.*) Leola! (*After regaining his almost stupified faculties, he crosses toward Tom.*) For heaven's sake, Tom, don't tell her!

TOM. (*Determined.*) I will tell her! She must know!

TED. Don't tell her tonight, consider it—tomorrow you may think differently.

TOM. Have you no sense of honor at all.

TED. Don't tonight! I'll make my own confession, but not tonight—not tonight! (*A rap at door.*) They're here! For God's sake, Tom, don't tell her—don't. (*Takes hold of Tom's hand pleadingly.*)

TOM. Come in. (*Starts up.*)

TED. (*Grasping his hand in a final appeal.*) Tom!

(*The door opens upon this scene; Leola and Will enter; Tom turns, looks at Ted and then crosses down center. Leola and Will are surprised and look at the scene with some little amazement. Tom then faces about and assumes a studious pose.*)

WILL. I didn't expect to see you again tonight, Ted. (*Ted's gaze is fixed upon Tom.*)

LEOLA. (*At Ted's side.*) Why, Ted, you're as pale as a ghost. What's happened?

TED. Nothing, Leola. (*Takes a step toward Tom, who remains motionless.*)

LEOLA. (*Crossing toward Tom.*) Tom, you're not saying a word.

TOM. (*Calmly.*) You have rendered me a great service, Leola. Ted too, has done wonders this evening. I'm deeply grateful to both of you. To make a long story short, we agreed upon these positions to find out the natural effect it would have on you and Will. It will serve as a strong and fitting climax in my new play. (*Ted brightens and crosses to Leola.*)

WILL. Well, of all the eccentricities of man. For originality, you've got anybody I know beat by a mile.

TOM. An undeserving compliment.

LEOLA. (*To Ted.*) Is this your appointment?

TED. Yes.

LEOLA. (*To Tom.*) And the excuse you offered to bring me here was to show me a painting by Jules Girardet.

TOM. Yes, I hope your desire to see it is as great as my sincerity of purpose. (*Pointing toward picture.*) There it is. (*He turns on the electric light.*)

(*Leola and Will cross up and look at the picture Ted crosses to Tom and grasps him warmly by the hand, while the curtain drops upon the picture.*)

CURTAIN.

THE FOURTH ACT.

The Scene is the same as that of the Third Act. Fourteen months are supposed to have elapsed. The walls are hung with several paintings used in Act. II. A telephone is on the desk. The curtain rises upon the dark, unoccupied room. The telephone rings repeatedly. Slight pause. TOM enters from door center, attired in evening dress. He crosses to the desk and turns on the electric lamp. He then removes his coat and exits right. Telephone rings again. Slight pause. TOM re-enters with a lounging robe on his arm and crosses to desk telephone and answers the call.

TOM. Hello! *(Pause.)* No, you'll find him at the theater. *(Pause.)* He didn't say. Good-by. *(Hangs up the receiver and put on his lounging robe. He is just at lighting a cigar when the telephone rings again. Answering.)* Hello! *(Pause.)* This you, Burt? *(Pause.)* Yes, right here. *(Pause.)* Yes. *(Pause.)* Yes. *(Pause, looks at watch.)* Rather short act. *(Pause.)* They did? Bully! *(Pause.)* I'm sorry, but I really can't. *(Pause.)* Oh no, I'm not afraid to face the audience, I'm perfectly calm. *(Pause.)* If they insist upon a curtain speech, I'd consider it a favor if you would answer for me. *(Pause.)* They won't know the difference. *(Pause.)* You think so? *(Pause.)* Yes, you might do that. *(Pause.)* Oh, tell them—tell them I died suddenly. *(Pause.)* You never can tell, you know. *(Pause.)* Yes, you might make that excuse. *(Pause.)* Ring me up after the third act and let me know how it takes. *(Pause.)* All right. Good-by. *(Hangs up the receiver and looks at his watch.)*

Enters WILL from door center, rather hurriedly.

WILL. What on earth are you doing her, Tom? *(Coming down.)* Why aren't you at the theater?

TOM. I'm indisposed.

WILL. Indisposed? And smoking a dark Havanna at that?

TOM. Force of habit.

WILL. Is that straight goods? Are you really sick, or can't you stand the nervous strain?

TOM. Neither, Will.

WILL. Why in thunder are you in hiding, then?

TOM. You don't understand my position.

WILL. I don't understand you at all. The curtain just dropped on the second act; the audience went wild and called for you. Lucille and I were dumb-founded with surprise at the play. Lucille almost fainted when the climax came at the end of the act.

TOM. I was afraid she would.

WILL. Why, you've got Lucille, Leola, Ted, yourself, and even myself mixed up in the story.

TOM. I see you recognize all the characters.

WILL. Is all of it true to life?

TOM. Up to the end of the third act. The last act is my own creation; you don't want to miss it; it will tell you why I am here and not at the theater tonight.

WILL. I don't want to miss any part of the play. I came to get you. My machine is waiting. (*Looks at watch.*) We'll have to hurry.

TOM. Don't wait for me and don't tell anybody I'm here.

WILL. I'll be hanged if I know how to take you.

TOM. Take me seriously—and go.

WILL. I was just about to laugh at you, but I guess I won't. You must have a purpose, of course, but I fail to even imagine any feasible reason.

TOM. Will you do me a favor?

WILL. Why yes.

TOM. Would you take my mother home in your machine after the play?

WILL. That's what I intend doing. By-the-by, I've got several surprises for you.

TOM. Several surprises?

WILL. Yes, Number one: Leola received a decree granting her absolute separation from Ted.

TOM. When?

WILL. This afternoon. Number two: She is at the theater this evening, and I invited her into our box. (*Tom bears an expression of pleasant surprise.*) Number three: Ted is also at the theater; I met him at the stage door; he looks very poor and his manners were most peculiar. He asked for you.

TOM. (*Slowly.*) Poor fellow, I tried my best to make a man of him.

WILL. Leola looks exceptionally well; she immediately asked for you. (*Tom turns aside somewhat depressed.*) She is enjoying the play immensely. (*Pause.*)

TOM. (*Brightens slightly.*) You'll miss the third act if you don't hurry back.

WILL. I'm afraid I've missed part of it already. (*Starting up.*) I'll ring you up after the act and let you know how it takes.

TOM. Thanks.

WILL. We may have to get you in order to satisfy the enthusiastic audience.

TOM. No fear of that; I'd advise you not to, even though they do insist.

WILL. I'll see you after the show, then. (*Exits.*)

(*Tom looks at his watch, crosses to the 'phone, removes receiver; pause.*) This the operator? (*Pause.*) This is apartment eight; kindly discontinue connection with my 'phone after ten o'clock. (*Pause.*) Not in. (*Pause.*) Yes. (*Pause.*) Thank you. Good-by.

(*Ted bursts into the room through door center.*)

TED. (*Coming down center furiously.*) I've found you at last, you coward!

TOM. (*Rising.*) Ted!

TED. You weren't satisfied with stealing the affections of my

wife and haunting her almost to death, but you dare to place the entire thing, lies and all, before the very public.

TOM. Only in character.

TED. You've made it plain enough.

TOM. And true to life, I hope!

TED. Yes, damn you! I'll kill you for that! (*He confronts him with a pistol.*)

TOM. (*Jumps to one side, at the same time grasping his pistol hand. A struggle follows, the pistol discharges and the bullet goes wild, breaking the looking-glass above the mantle-piece. Tom succeeds in wrenching the weapon from Ted's hand.*) So you've come to kill me! You very nearly succeeded, too. (*Crosses toward chair right, extracting the bullets from the barrel unperceived by Ted, and lays the pistol on the table.*) You're not very much disappointed, are you, now since you've had a little time to think it over and realize the full extent of such a deed?

TED. I'll get you yet! (*Crosses up center.*)

TOM. Where are you going?

TED. Where do you suppose?

TOM. I didn't suppose you'd go very far at present. (*Picks up revolver playfully.*) Sit down here.

TED. (*Coming down.*) Well?

TOM. Kindly be seated. (*Ted sits; Tom follows.*) What motive have you for wanting to take my life? What is there within you that is pouring oil on the flame?

TED. You know that as well as I.

TOM. Primarily, let's say then, it's love!

TED. That's not all, and you know it!

TOM. I'm trying to make my point. I said primarily—the cause of your agitation—the spell-binding power that first made you a liar, then a defaulter, a thief, and now a murderer!

TED. (*Turning as though apprehending the extent of his degradation.*) Tom!

TOM. The powers within you, poisoned by your numerous misdeeds, are easily controlled by mere impulsive flashes of

thoughts and ideas enslaving you to execute them in all their immaturity. Man does much in this frame of mind at the impulse of a moment; he afterwards regrets. It's the concentration of your entire mind and energy upon the object of your insane passion, as against the lone, weak defenseless soul, which ultimately bears the burden of your sins and meets with eternal damnation! Do you fully appreciate what I'm saying?

TED. You always were damn sentimental.

TOM. That's the great difference between us. (*Leaning over the table.*) Ted, I'm going to take you into my confidence; a strange thing to do with a man of your calibre. You say I'm sentimental; that's the power within me that controls my mind; I have been a slave to that power, and often against the will and determination of my mind. In a moment of great dejection, caused by the same feeling of love as yours, acting upon the conditions of the powers within, my heart and soul prompted me to make a pledge to my Creator to face death at a certain hour. The hour is very close, and I stand ready now without fear to pay the debt.

TED. That's in your play.

TOM. In reality, too! I have since found much in life to live for. The love which bound me to my sentiments has since worn off. I never valued life so much as I do tonight.

TED. I'm beginning to understand you, Tom.

TOM. (*Grasping his hand.*) I'm glad you do, Ted! You are still very young and have much to live for; brace up, study the powers within you; turn bad into good, and pray God to forgive you!

TED. (*Lowering his head.*) I will!

TOM. (*Rising.*) Here is your pistol. (*Gives it to him.*) Stand where you are. (*Ted rises.*) Now put your right arm out like this. (*Holds his arm in firing position; Ted follows.*) The pistol is cocked—press the trigger!

TED. (*His hand trembles and the pistol drops to the table.*) I couldn't do it now—I couldn't, Tom! (*Pause.*)

TOM. You are in the midst of a great battle; fight with the heart of a loyal soldier and you are bound to win!

TED. Forgive me, Tom. (*Extending hand; Tom take it.*) I don't deserve it!

TOM. You must sin no more!

TED. I promise! I'm going out West and begin life all over again.

TOM. That's the bravest thing you ever said.

TED. (*Turning to go.*) Good-night.

TOM. Here are your bullets and the pistol; you may need them out West.

TED. I don't want to touch them! I'll never handle another in my life—never! (*He crosses to door and exits.*)

TOM... (*Turns out all but one electric light and then sits on chair right. He takes his watch from his pocket, looks at it and then sinks back into his chair. Softly.*) Only three more minutes! (*He clasps his hands firmly and lowers his head, while the curtain drops. The curtain rises after a slight pause. An hour is supposed to have elapsed. Tom is discovered sound asleep on the chair.*)

The door center opens and WILL enters, followed closely by MRS. ERFORD, LEOLA and LUCILLE.

WILL. (*Upon entering immediately crosses toward Tom.*) Tom! (*Pause.*) Oh Tom! (*No answer.*)

MRS. ERFORD. (*Crosses to table, spies the pistol.*) What's this? (*Seeing Tom, screams hysterically.*) Tom! Tom! (*Shake him.*)

TOM. (*Awakening.*) Mother! (*He rises.*)

MRS. ERFORD. (*Anxiously.*) Are you safe?

TOM. (*Embracing her.*) Yes, thank God!

MRS. ERFORD. (*Sobbing.*) My boy! My boy! You frightened me.

TOM. (*Embracing her.*) I'm sorry, mother

MRS. ERFORD. Your play ended so much like this that for a moment I feared—Oh, God forgive me! The pistol, the glass, and

you here, apparently lifeless. What other conclusion could I more quickly arrive at?

TOM. There—there mother, it's all right. (*Pointing to broken glass.*) That was a mere accident.

MRS. ERFORD. How did it happen?

TOM. Well, you see they needed a pistol in my play; I bought this one for that purpose, but when I arrived at the theater they already were supplied with a pistol, so I took it home with me.

MRS. ERFORD. But the shot—how did that happen?

TOM. The dealer sold me bullets instead of blanks. I tried one for fun.

MRS. ERFORD. Why weren't you at the theater?

TOM. I'll explain that later.

MRS. ERFORD. Your play is a success! Tom, a success!

WILL. It's the greatest thing on Broadway.

TOM. Bully! (*Turning, sees Leola and Lucille.*) Why, Good-evening, Leola. I didn't know you were here. (*Shakes her warmly by the hand.*)

LEOLA. I congratulate you, Tom. I never enjoyed a play more in my life.

TOM. (*Modestly.*) Thank you. (*To Lucille.*) Hello, Lucille! (*Shakes hands.*)

LUCILLE. Congratulations, Tom, it's great!

WILL. The audience simply went wild at the end of the third act. They called for you repeatedly. Your leading man finally stepped before the curtain and announced that you were indisposed. This seemed to satisfy them until one of the young gallery-gods yelled down through his megaphone-shaped program: "He's soused!"

TOM. (*Laughing.*) I suppose the majority believed the boy. (*Tom crosses to Leola.*)

WILL. There are always some that will imagine so, anyway. (*He notices that Mrs. Erford is removing her hat.*) Keep your hat on, Mrs. Erford.

MRS. ERFORD. Why?

WILL. I ordered a dinner at Rector's. We'll drive over immediately.

MRS. ERFORD. Oh! Well, I'll just put it back on again. (Does so.)

WILL. You had better get your things on, Tom. (Tom's attention is too much occupied in Leola.) I say we'll have to hurry; it's nearly mid-night now. (Lucille and Mrs. Erford cross toward door center; Will crosses toward Tom.) Pardon the interruption, Leola. (Places hand on Tom's shoulder.) My wife and your mother are waiting for you; are you coming?

TOM. Oh, pardon me, I wasn't listening to you. I'll be ready in a minute. (Crosses right toward exit.)

WILL. I'll crank the machine in the meantime.

TOM. I'll be right down. (Exits right.)

WILL. (At door center.) Are you coming, Leola?

LEOLA. I'll wait for Tom, if you don't mind.

WILL. All right. (Opens door, Lucille and Mrs. Erford exit.) Jerk him up a bit if he doesn't hurry. (Exits.)

LEOLA. (Crosses to desk and picks up the revolver; she steps back in surprise, examining it closely.)

TOM re-enters.

TOM. (Upon seeing Leola.) Very kind of you to wait for me, Leola.

LEOLA. (Hides the pistol behind her back.) My, but you dressed quickly.

TOM. My coat is all I needed.

LEOLA. Was Ted here this evening?

TOM. (Undecidedly.) Why—no.

LEOLA. Were you asleep all evening?

TOM. No, I fell asleep shortly before you entered.

LEOLA. At what time did this accident occur?

TOM. What accident?

LEOLA. The discharge of this pistol.

TOM. Why, shortly before I fell asleep.

LEOLA. Wasn't that a rather late hour to experiment with a pistol in an apartment house?

TOM. It was more by accident. I emptied the barrel as soon as I discovered they were not blanks.

LEOLA. Lucky, wasn't it that they had one at the theater? It would have been a case of criminal negligence on your part to allow its use in the play. Think what might have happened.

TOM. I never thought of that.

LEOLA. You didn't have time, Tom. You improvised the first thought that entered your mind as an excuse.

TOM. What excuse, Leola?

LEOLA. You never handled this pistol before it was discharged; it's Ted's. I know that beyond a doubt. Where is he?

TOM. I—don't—know.

LEOLA. You have always tried to shield him, Tom. Perhaps it would have been better for both of us had you not.

TOM. (*With an involuntary move toward her.*) Leola!

LEOLA. I would not have been disgraced for one.

TOM. That was the one thing I tried hard to prevent; that I failed was no fault of mine. I wanted to see you happy—very happy. I realized that there was no greater happiness on earth than to love and be loved!

LEOLA. I could never have loved him had I known him for what he is.

TOM. Love makes cowards of the brave and weaklings of the strong. If my acts were to blame for any of your discomforts, I humbly beg your pardon. (*Bows.*)

LEOLA. You have one great fault, Tom. You think too little of yourself. (*The door bell rings.*)

TOM. Excuse me. (*Crosses to talking tube.*) Hello! (*Pause.*) Yes, we're on the way, Will. (*To Leola.*) They are waiting for us. (*Opens the door.*)

LEOLA. Tom, are you quite sure that Ted will not molest you in the future.

TOM. I am positively sure of that.

LEOLA. Everything seems so much like your play, with the exception of the end.

TOM. Don't you like the way it ended?

LEOLA. (At door.) No.

TOM. Suppose I change it so that it will end this way. (He opens his arms, making a slight move toward her.)

LEOLA. (Sinks into his ready embrace.) Tom!

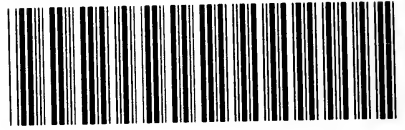
TOM. Leola! (He kisses her lips passionately, while the curtain drops.)

CURTAIN.

THE END.



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